

THE PLAGUE DOCTOR

POCKETS FULL OF POSIES.

By: Erik Nell, 2018



PLAGUE DOCTOR

Meandering through a blighted village, a halfling kneels beside the emaciated body of a human child. The child's lips are dry and cracked, her skin covered in blackened sores. The halfling waits patiently, peering through the lenses of his mask. There it is; a slight rising of the child's chest. She breathes still. Hurrying, the halfling opens his medicine bag and quickly mixes together a handful of herbs and curious liquids, tipping the small vial into the child's mouth. She may survive yet.

Bearing her torch aloft, a human steps quietly through the catacombs that crawl beneath the city. She listens for a moment, and in the distance she makes out a soft sound; an anguished moaning, echoing along the walls of the crypt. Pulling her blade and whispering an incantation to protect against the abominations, she creeps forward, leaping at the last moment to remove the head of the creature that has been spreading disease and suffering throughout her city.

Crows wheel overhead as the half-elf picks their footing carefully through the battlefield. The fog of war has cleared, but a miasma still hangs over the area. They had watched the battle from the encampment, and now that it was over, they searched for survivors. As they inspected a body for any signs of life, an enemy combatant rises from the ground and lunges at the half-elf. They back peddle wildly, crying out a curse at their assailant. The warrior falls to the ground, choking on his own breath, before toppling over, blood and pus oozing from his lips, his body bloating with abnormal quickness.

MACABRE SCHOLARS

Plague Doctors have a fascination, some would say morbid obsession, with biology, death, and disease. Spending many years devoted to the study of the body and the ailments that may afflict it, plague doctors are dedicated to the extermination of pestilence wherever it might try to reach. Some plague doctors spend their time researching and discovering various concoctions that might better prevent or combat plague as it spreads among the populace, while others hone their skills as cunning warriors, dedicating their lives to eradicating with sword and purifying fire any creature that brings illness upon the land. A few plague doctors have become so desensitized to the horrors they witness, or so filled with hatred for these diseases and those who spread them, that they use their vast knowledge to develop their own supernatural plagues to bring to bear against their foes.

In combat, a plague doctor is a valuable ally. Using their tinctures and spells, they can be a boon to their comrades, and a curse to their enemies. A plague doctor approaches combat with a shrewd cunning, remaining beyond the reach of the fray as much as possible to better assist his allies, careful to allocate their assistance where it will be most effective, but close enough that they can rush in and stabilize a fallen friend, or strike down an enemy with violent precision.

FEARED PHYSICIANS

A plague doctor rarely finds a warm welcome in the areas they visit. Though their work is invaluable, they are also viewed as an ill omen, for where a plague doctor goes, calamity has either struck, or is soon to follow. A few plague doctors have become so twisted by the horrors they see daily, that they become monsters in their own right, and work to undo the efforts of their less twisted brethren.

Some more powerful plague doctors can learn to channel this fear and use it to drive away the enemies of the innocent, instilling terror in the wicked and the profane. Theirs is a darker side to good works, and rare is the plague doctor who feels that, when it comes to their line of work, the ends don't justify the means.

CREATING A PLAGUE DOCTOR

As you create your plague doctor, give some thought to why you pursued such grisly studies. What is it about death and disease that drew you to search it out, when so many others might run away? Did you lose friends and family to plague, and as the survivor, you've developed a burning desire to sniff it out? Perhaps you've always had a fascination with the forces of life and death, and the studies and travels of a plague doctor were a natural progression from childhood inquisitiveness? Are you a nihilist who understands that entropy is a part of the natural order, and you are only playing your own small role in the grander scheme of the multiverse that most people can't even fathom, let alone appreciate? Not all plague doctors work for the greater good, after all.

Consider your relationship to the populace. Most people fear the presence of a plague doctor, though your work is certainly important. How does your character handle being an object of fear, and in some cases, of loathing? Do you embrace and accept it, acknowledging it is a necessary sacrifice in a line of work that is desperately needed in many regions? Or do you resent the people you seek to aid, fighting off the urge to leave the ungrateful wretches to suffer? Or worse, do you cultivate that fear and your gruesome knowledge, turning it against the very people you first swore to help? The life of a plague doctor can certainly be lonely, and few can walk through so many horrors and tragedies and emerge unscathed.

QUICK BUILD

You can make a plague doctor by following these suggestions. First, Intelligence should be your highest ability score, with Constitution a close second, followed by Dexterity. Second, choose the Sage background. Third, choose the *resistance*, *sacred flame*, and *spare the dying* cantrips, along with the following first level spells for your journal: *burning hands*, *cure wounds*, and *detect poison and disease*.

CLASS FEATURES

As a plague doctor, you gain the following class features.

HIT POINTS

Hit Dice: 1d8 per Plague Doctor level

Hit Points at 1st level: 8 + Con modifier

Hit Points at Higher Levels: 1d8 (or 5) + Con modifier

PROFICIENCIES

Armor: Light Armor

Weapons: Club, dagger, quarterstaff, sickle, shortsword, light crossbow, darts, blowguns

Tools: Herbalism Kit, Healer's Kit

Saving Throws: Intelligence, Constitution

Skills: Choose two from Arcana, History, Insight, Medicine, Perception

EQUIPMENT

You start with the following equipment, in addition to the equipment granted by your background:

- (a) a quarterstaff or (b) a sickle
- (a) a blow gun and 30 darts or (b) a light crossbow and 20 bolts
- (a) an explorer's pack or (b) an arcane focus
- A Plague Doctor's outfit (cloak, gloves, Leather Armor, mask, hat), Healer's Kit, and Herbalism Kit

SPELLCASTING

Plague Doctors spend years studying anatomy, medicine, and the various spells useful in their trade. These notes, lessons, and formulae are kept in a plague doctor's journal.

CANTRIPS

At 1st level, you know three cantrips of your choice from the plague doctor spell list. You learn additional plague doctor cantrips of your choice at higher levels, as shown in the Cantrips Known column of the plague doctor table.

JOURNAL

At 1st level, you have a journal containing six 1st-level plague doctor spells of your choice. Your journal is the repository of the plague doctor spells you know, except your cantrips, which are fixed in your mind.

PREPARING AND CASTING SPELLS

Table: The Plague Doctor shows how many spell slots you have to cast your spells of 1st level and higher. To cast one of these spells, you must expend a slot of the spell's level or higher. You regain all expended spell slots when you finish a long rest. You prepare the list of plague doctor spells that are available for you to cast. To do so, choose a number of plague doctor spells from your journal equal to your Intelligence modifier + your plague doctor level (minimum of one spell). The spells must be of a level for which you have spell slots.

For example, if you're a 3rd-level plague doctor, you have four 1st-level and two 2nd-level spell slots. With an Intelligence of 16, your list of prepared spells can include six spells of 1st or 2nd level, in any combination, chosen from your journal. If you prepare the 1st-level spell cure wounds, you can cast it using a 1st-level or a 2nd-level slot. Casting the spell doesn't remove it from your list of prepared spells.

You can change your list of prepared spells when you finish a long rest. Preparing a new list of plague doctor spells requires time spent studying your journal and memorizing the incantations and gestures you must make to cast the spell: at least 1 minute per spell level for each spell on your list.

SPELLCASTING ABILITY

Intelligence is your spellcasting ability for your plague doctor spells, since you learn your spells through dedicated study and memorization. You use your Intelligence whenever a spell refers to your spellcasting ability. In addition, you use your Intelligence modifier when setting the saving throw DC for a plague doctor spell you cast and when making an attack roll with one.

Spell save DC = 8 + your proficiency bonus + your Intelligence modifier

Spell attack modifier = your proficiency bonus + your Intelligence modifier

RITUAL CASTING

You can cast a plague doctor spell as a ritual if that spell has the ritual tag and you have the spell in your journal. You don't need to have the spell prepared.

SPELLCASTING FOCUS

You can use an arcane focus as a spellcasting focus for your plague doctor spells.

LEARNING SPELLS OF 1ST LEVEL AND HIGHER

Each time you gain a Plague Doctor level, you can add two plague doctor spells of your choice to your journal for free. Each of these spells must be of a level for which you have spell slots, as shown on the plague doctor table. On your adventures, you might find other spells that you can add to your journal (see "Your Journal").

PHYSICIAN

Using a Healer's Kit, a Plague Doctor can double their proficiency bonus when using the Medicine skill to diagnose and treat a disease, as well as on any roll to stabilize a target. A Plague Doctor can also attempt to stabilize a target as a bonus action on their turn.

THE PLAGUE DOCTOR

Level	Proficiency Bonus	Features	Cantrips Known	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th
1st	+2	Spellcasting, Physician	3	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
2nd	+2	Tincture Lore	3	3	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
3rd	+2	Plague Doctor Discipline	3	4	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
4th	+2	Ability Score Improvement	4	4	3	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
5th	+3	Grim Spectre	4	4	3	2	—	—	—	—	—	—
6th	+3	Discipline Feature	4	4	3	3	—	—	—	—	—	—
7th	+3	New Tincture	4	4	3	3	1	—	—	—	—	—
8th	+3	Ability Score Improvement	4	4	3	3	2	—	—	—	—	—
9th	+4	—	4	4	3	3	3	1	—	—	—	—
10th	+4	Discipline Feature	5	4	3	3	3	2	—	—	—	—
11th	+4	Miasmatic Inoculum, Tincture Lore Improvement	5	4	3	3	3	2	1	—	—	—
12th	+4	Ability Score Improvement	5	4	3	3	3	2	1	—	—	—
13th	+5	New Tincture	5	4	3	3	3	2	1	1	—	—
14th	+5	Discipline Feature	5	4	3	3	3	2	1	1	—	—
15th	+5	—	5	4	3	3	3	2	1	1	1	—
16th	+5	Ability Score Improvement	5	4	3	3	3	2	1	1	1	—
17th	+6	Grim Spectre 30ft	5	4	3	3	3	2	1	1	1	1
18th	+6	New Tincture, Tincture Lore Improvement	5	4	3	3	3	3	1	1	1	1
19th	+6	—	5	4	3	3	3	3	2	1	1	1
20th	+6	Vestige of Pestilence	5	4	3	3	3	3	2	2	1	1

TINCTURE LORE

Starting at 2nd level, you have learned to craft versatile potions called Tinctures. A Tincture is a rapidly brewed potion that is concocted by mixing together various herbs and other ingredients, called “medicinals”, that the Plague Doctor collects throughout the course of their career. Depending on the medicinals selected during the brewing process, a Tincture can produce a wide array of effects, including minor healing, resistances, and other benefits.

You can brew a number of Tinctures per day equal to your Intelligence modifier plus one, with a minimum of one. When you do, you select two different effects from the list of medicinals you’ve discovered to creature the Tincture.

Tinctures are normally brewed when you finish a long rest, taking ten minutes to brew each one, but you can brew these Tinctures later in the day if you wish. Once imbibed, the effect of the Tincture lasts for one minute. In the case of medicinals that grant advantage or a bonus on dice rolls, the benefit must be used within the minute duration or it is lost. As Tinctures are prepared quicker and with less precision than true magic potions, Tinctures you brew lose their efficacy after a day.

When you gain this class feature, you may select four medicinals from the list below for use in preparing your Tinctures. You learn one additional medicinal of your choice at 7th, 13th, and 18th levels.

At 11th level, you can add a third medicinal to your Tinctures.

At 18th level, any resistances the medicinals grant become immunities for the duration.



YOUR JOURNAL

The spells that you add to your journal as you gain levels reflect the medical and esoteric research you conduct on your own, as well as intellectual breakthroughs you have had about the nature of magic. You might find other spells during your adventures. You could discover a spell recorded on a scroll in an evil wizard's chest, for example, or in a dusty tome in an ancient library.

Copying a Spell into the journal: When you find a plague doctor spell of 1st level or higher, you can add it to your journal if it is of a spell level you can prepare and if you can spare the time to decipher and copy it.

Copying that spell into your journal involves reproducing the basic form of the spell, then deciphering the unique system of notation used by whoever wrote it. You must practice the spell until you understand the sounds or gestures required, then transcribe it into your journal using your own notation.

For each level of the spell, the process takes 2 hours and costs 50 gp. The cost represents material components you expend as you experiment with the spell to master it, as well as the fine inks you need to record it. Once you have spent this time and money, you can prepare the spell just like your other spells.

Replacing the journal: You can copy a spell from your own journal into another book—for example, if you want to make a backup copy of your journal. This is just like copying a new spell into your journal, but faster and easier, since you understand your own notation and already know how to cast the spell. You need spend only 1 hour and 10 gp for each level of the copied spell.

If you lose your journal, you can use the same procedure to transcribe the spells that you have prepared into a new journal. Filling out the remainder of your journal requires you to find new spells to do so, as normal. For this reason, many plague doctors keep backup journals in a safe place.

The Journal's Appearance: Your journal is a unique compilation of spells, notes, and formulae, with its own decorative flourishes and margin notes. It might be a plain, functional leather volume that you received as a gift from a professor, an ream of loose papers kept in a simple case, or even a loose collection of notes scrounged together after you lost your previous journal in a mishap, wrapped with string.

MEDICINALS

The following are medicinals you can discover in your travels, studies, and experiments to make your Tinctures.

Bitterweed: Immunity to sleep effects for 1 minute. Immediately awakens someone who is sleeping.

Fairymoss: Gain advantage on your next Wisdom saving throw

Fellenwort: Gain resistance to psychic damage for 1 minute

Blunt-Leaved Field Cress: Add 1d4 to your next saving throw to resist being Frightened

Fluxroot: Gain advantage on your next saving throw against infection from or the effects of a disease

Roundleaf Milfoil: Gain resistance to necrotic damage for 1 minute

Prickle Fern: Gain advantage on your next saving throw to resist being blinded or deafened

Ribwort: Heal 1d4+1 hit points

Snakeberry: Gain resistance to poison damage for 1 minute and add 1d4 on your next saving throw to avoid being poisoned

Spoolwood: Gain +10ft to your movement speed for 1 minute. During this duration, standing from prone only costs 5ft of movement

Woodbine: Add 1d4 to your next roll to resist being paralyzed

Yellowbark: Gain advantage on your next saving throw to resist being stunned

PLAGUE DOCTOR DISCIPLINE

When you reach 3rd level, you choose to focus your skills and knowledge toward a particular discipline: Bloodletting or Pathogenesis, both detailed at the end of the class description. Your choice grants you features at 3rd level and again at 6th, 10th, and 14th level.

GRIM SPECTRE

Plague doctor's are seen as portents of calamity, as they are usually encountered when plague has already stricken a settlement or region. Though their work is invaluable, plague doctors are viewed with as much fear and trepidation as they are respect. As such, experienced plague doctors are trained to amplify that association with fear, the better to drive off those who would intentionally spread the taint of disease throughout the world.

At 5th level, you gain the ability to create an aura of fear as an action. The aura lasts for a number of rounds per day equal to the plague doctor's level. When active, any creature that starts its turn within 10ft you must make a Wisdom saving throw. On a failed save, the creature is frightened until the start of its next turn. If a creature's saving throw is successful, the creature is immune to the your Grim Spectre for 24 hours. The difficulty of the saving throw equals the your spell save DC.

At 17th level, the aura extends out to 30 ft.

MIASMIC INOCULUM

At 11th level, the Plague Doctor has spent so much time studying, healing, preventing, and being exposed to diseases and poisons, that they develop supernatural defences to protect against them. You gain immunity to disease; you also gain resistance to poison damage as well as advantage on saving throws versus being poisoned. If you are already resistant to poison damage, either through a racial ability or some other feature, you instead gain immunity to poison damage and the poisoned condition.

Plague Doctor's spend so much time among the diseased and dying that they become desensitized to much that is frightful and dangerous in the world. Also at this level, you gain advantage on saving throws to resist being frightened.

VESTIGE OF PESTILENCE

At 20th level, once per day as a bonus action, you can remove one condition from a creature you can see within 60 feet and apply it to another creature within 60 feet. The conditions you can do this with are: blinded, deafened, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, and stunned. A creature that is immune to the condition still suffers the effects of it if it is applied in this manner. The effect lasts for 1 minute.

PLAGUE DOCTOR DISCIPLINES

It takes years of study for a plague doctor to understand the various humanoid biologies of the world and how diseases affect them. It takes many more years of practice, travel, and experience to be able to hone that accumulated knowledge into a skillset that can not only heal the sick, but protect from the progenitors of plagues and curses as well. As plague doctors gain in wisdom and experience, as their feet log countless lonely miles traveling between plague stricken lands, eventually they must focus their talents into an area that they feel best serves the needs of the populace, or of their personal adventures.

BLOODLETTING

An archaic form of treatment, bloodletting is still popular in areas where the populace is either poorly educated or lacking in divine healers. Before plague doctors developed a thorough understanding of how disease and the body functions, as well as their utilization of formulas and magics to combat pestilence, bloodletting was a popular form of treatment among their ranks.

Nowadays, the theories behind bloodletting have been expanded upon, with the modern understanding of science and magic that plague doctors enjoy. The technique has been developed by more martial minded plague doctors to be used against those who spread illness and suffering.

BONUS PROFICIENCIES

When this Discipline is selected, you gain proficiency with medium armor, shields, and the glaive, longsword, rapier, and heavy crossbow.

DRAIN THE HUMOURS

At 3rd level, when you damage a creature with a melee attack using a slashing or piercing weapon, you can choose to inflict a bleeding wound. If you do, the creature must make a Constitution saving throw versus your spell save DC or suffer an additional 1d4 bleeding damage, and an further 1d4 bleeding damage at the start of your next turn. This damage increases as you gain levels: 1d6 at 6th level, 2d4 at 10th level, and 1d10 at 14th level. Constructs, Elementals, and Undead (except Vampires and Vampire Spawn) are immune to this effect.

You can use this feature a number of times per day equal to your Intelligence modifier. You regain all uses after finishing a long rest.

BALANCING THE HUMOURS

At 6th level, your understanding of blood grows. Drawing connections between a creature's blood and mind, you can affect the creature's temperament, hampering its ability to fight effectively.

When a creature fails a save against your Drain the Humours ability, you can choose to Balance the Humours and impart one of the following effects on the creature. The creature suffers from this effect for a number of rounds equal to your Intelligence modifier. Once you use this feature, you cannot use it again until you finish a short or long rest.

Phlegmatic: the creature has disadvantage on Constitution saving throws for the duration.

Choleric: the creature only heals half the amount from a healing source for the duration.

Melancholic: The creature's movement speed is halved for the duration.

PHLEBOTOMY

At 10th level, you can add your Intelligence modifier as a bonus to the damage inflicted by your Drain the Humours feature.

EXSANGUINATION

At 14th level, when a creature fails its save against Drain the Humours, the creature is stunned until the end of your next turn.

PATHOGENESIS

A plague doctor spends many years studying and understanding the causes, treatments, cures, and other details about how diseases work. By collecting samples of diseased tissue and other specimens, plague doctors are able to utilize their discoveries to more efficiently identify specific plagues and treat patients. For plague doctors who study the discipline of pathogenesis, their knowledge of disease becomes a weapon. They learn to create and infect their enemies with a disease of their own creation, and even inspire fear into the allies of the afflicted, leaving them weakened and alone.

INFECTION

At 3rd level, you can infect a creature with a virulent magic disease of your own design. When you hit a target with a melee attack, you can choose to infect the target with the disease. The target takes an additional 2d6 necrotic damage from the attack and must make a Constitution saving throw versus your spell save DC. On a failed save the target is infected with a virulent, magic disease, and it has disadvantage on all attacks rolls, ability checks, and saving throws for a number of rounds equal to the plague doctor's level, as its body attempts to fight off the disease. How this disease manifests is up to you; for example, the target's body might erupt with grotesque pustules, it might vomit uncontrollably, or thin layers of skin might rapidly dry and slough painfully from its body.

Once you use this ability, you cannot use it again until you finish a short or long rest.

At 14th level you can use this ability twice between rests, but no more than once in a round.

HYPPOCHONDRIA

At 6th level, when you hit a creature with your Infection ability, you can choose a number of creatures within a 30ft. radius of the target equal to your Intelligence modifier. Each creature selected must make a Wisdom saving throw against your spell save DC. On a failed save, affected creatures are frightened of the target of your Infection ability for one minute. The creatures can repeat this saving throw at the end of each of their turns, ending the effect on a success. If a creature's saving throw is successful or the effect ends for it, the creature is immune to your Hypochondria and Grim Spectre features for the next 24 hours.

Once you use this ability, you cannot use it again until you finish a long rest.

CONTAGION

At 10th level, you can Infect a target using a ranged weapon.

Also at 10th level, you add your Intelligence modifier as bonus damage to any attack that deals necrotic damage.

EPIDEMIC

When you reach 14th level, the magic disease you've created takes on a life of its own. If a creature is killed while suffering from your Infection ability, or died as a result of the damage inflicted by the Infection, the creature releases a cloud of diseased air in a 30ft radius. The air is heavily obscured, and creatures you choose that are caught within the cloud must make a Constitution saving throw or take 8d8 necrotic damage and are stunned until the end of your next turn. Creatures who pass the saving throw take half of the damage and are not stunned.

Once you use this ability, you cannot use it again until you finish a long rest.



PLAGUE DOCTOR SPELL LIST

CANTRIPS (0 LEVEL)

Acid Splash
Light
Mage Hand
Message
Poison Spray
Resistance
Sacred Flame
Shillelagh
Spare the Dying

1ST LEVEL

Bane
Bless
Burning Hnds
Create or Destroy Water
Cure Wounds
Detect Magic
Detect Poison and Disease
False Life
Fog Cloud
Goodberry
Healing Word
Hex
Inflict Wounds
Protection from Evil and
 Good
Purify Food and Drink
Ray of Sickness
Sleep

Tasha's Hideous Laughter

2ND LEVEL

Aid
Blindness/Deafness
Calm Emotions
Continual Flame
Crown of Madness
Darkness
Darkvision
Gentle Repose
Gust of Wind
Hold Person
Locate Animals or Plants
Melf's Acid Arrow
Misty Step
Prayer of Healing
Protection from Poison
Ray of Enfeeblement

3RD LEVEL

Bestow Curse
Create Food and Water
Dispel Magic
Fear
Feign Death
Gaseous Form
Mass Healing Word
Remove Curse
Revivify

Speak with Dead
Stinking Cloud

4TH LEVEL

Arcane Eye
Aura of Life
Aura of Purity
Blight
Confusion
Death Ward
Fire Shield
Freedom of Movement
Stoneskin

5TH LEVEL

Antilife Shell
Cloudkill
Contagion
Control Winds
Dispel Good and Evil
Flame Strike
Greater Restoration
Hallow
Insect Plague
Mass Cure Wounds
Raise Dead
Scrying

6TH LEVEL

Circle of Death
Disintegrate

Eyebite
Harm
Heal
Hero's Feast
Move Earth
Sunbeam

7TH LEVEL

Divine Word
Finger of Death
Fire Storm
Regenerate
Resurrection
Sequester
Simulacrum

8TH LEVEL

Antimagic Field
Antipathy/Sympathy
Feeblemind
Incendiary Cloud
Maze
Power Word Stun

9TH LEVEL

Mass Heal
Power Word Heal
Power Word Kill
True Resurrection